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A Reputation For Integrity

William H. Webster

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WASHINGTON, March 3 — When he took command of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1978, William H. Webster faced an agency in turmoil.

The bureau was racked by disclosures involving a range of improper activities by F.B.I. agents, including domestic surveillance campaigns, illegal wiretaps and "black bag" jobs directed at radical and civil-rights groups.

In the nine years since his arrival in Washington, Mr. Webster, a former Federal judge, is seen as having largely restored the reputation of the F.B.I., pulling the bureau into the modern era of law enforcement.

Senate Approval Expected

President Reagan's nomination of Mr. Webster, 63 years old, to be the Director of Central Intelligence is expected to be approved in the Senate, where Mr. Webster is widely admired in both political parties.

A reserved, slightly formal man who prefers to be called "Judge," Mr. Webster has a reputation for absolute integrity. Within the bureau he is described as stern and uncompromising in his appraisal of his staff.

"I came here because I thought this institution was too important to lose," Mr. Webster said of the F.B.I. in an interview last year. "I was determined to see the institution viewed again as it had been in the past."

Under Mr. Webster, the F.B.I. has ex-



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William H. Webster at a hearing on the budget yesterday.

panded while dramatically shifting the focus of its investigations. Where once the F.B.I. dwelled on bank robberies and car thefts, its agents are now more likely to concern themselves with white-collar crime, corruption by public officials and espionage. The recent efforts of the F.B.I. and the Justice Department against organized crime are viewed as historic.

For the first time in its history, Mr. Webster brought the F.B.I. into drug investigations, an area that his predecessor, J. Edgar Hoover, largely ignored.

The bureau also moved into an era of high-technology crime solving. Under Mr. Webster, wiretaps and other electronic surveillance has been used more than ever before, even though the strategy has brought extensive criticism.

In the Abscam investigation in the late 1970's, the bureau filmed lawmakers accepting bribes from undercover agents posing as representatives of a fictitious Arab sheik. Some lawmakers later described the surveillance techniques as entrapment.

Budget Has Doubled

"We are doing the work the American people expect of us, and we are doing it the way the Constitution demands of us," Mr. Webster said of the bureau's investigative strategy.

The F.B.I. budget has more than doubled since Mr. Webster's arrival and is expected to total \$1.2 billion this year.

At the same time, the bureau has managed to eliminate its Hoover-era image as an all-white, all-male force. The bureau's roster of 9,100 special agents now includes 350 Hispanic agents, 350 blacks and 650 women.

Counterintelligence has been of special importance to the bureau under Mr. Webster. His involvement in the spate of recent spy cases, particularly the capture of the Walker family spy ring in 1985, has provided him with experience that is bound to be of assistance if he wins Senate confirmation to the C.I.A. post.

Agents Arrested

Despite his efforts to rebuild the F.B.I., Mr. Webster's years at the bureau have also been marked by disputes. Several F.B.I. agents have been arrested under Mr. Webster's watch, including Richard W. Miller, who was convicted last year of spying for the Soviet Union.

Also last year, an agent in Cleveland was indicted on charges that he lied under oath about his dealings with Jackie Presser, the president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Mr. Presser, who is also under indictment, has been identified as an F.B.I. informant. The Presser case has prompted extensive questioning on Capitol Hill about the bureau's dealings with informants in other investigations.

In the past, some veteran agents have complained privately that Mr. Webster has moved too slowly to discipline agents accused of wrongdoing or incompetence. And they say he has too often distanced himself from the day-to-day responsibilities of the agency.

But Mr. Webster's supporters say the attacks tend to come from agents who are aligned with the policies of Mr.

Hoover.

William Hedgcock Webster was born in St. Louis on March 6, 1924, and received a bachelor's degree from Amherst College. He was graduated from the Washington University Law School in St. Louis in 1949.

He prospered in Missouri legal circles, serving as a partner in the St. Louis law firm of Armstrong, Teasdale, Kramer and Vaughan from 1956 to 1959. In 1960 he was named United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Missouri.

He then discovered what associates say is his true vocation: jurist. President Nixon named in 1971 to the Federal bench in St. Louis, eventually elevating him to the Federal Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit.

A Conservative Image

The role of judge clearly suited Mr. Webster, who speaks in a slow, ponderous style that is best appreciated by defendants in a Federal courthouse. His conservative attire — gray suits and button-down collars — promote the judicial image.

Friends in government say that Mr. Webster has always longed to return to the bench. His nomination to be the nation's intelligence chief, they think, could open the way for Mr. Webster to fulfill what has always appeared to be his dream — appointment to the Supreme Court.

In the months following the death of his wife, Drusilla, in 1984, Mr. Webster's attention to his job seemed unfocused and many suggested he would not last out his 10-year term at the F.B.I.

The couple, known as one of the most devoted in Washington, had two other children, William Jr. and Katherine.

Although he eventually regained his momentum, there have been recent reports that Mr. Webster planned to leave the bureau this year, before his term had ended.

A Carter Appointee

The reports were dashed, however, when Mr. Webster announced he would remain while investigators sorted out the worst crisis of the Reagan Presidency, the Iran-contra affair.

When approached in 1978 by President Carter and Attorney General Griffin Bell, Mr. Webster had not been seeking the F.B.I. job. He was seen as reluctant to accept a position that had been tarnished by the revelations about the Watergate scandal and the actions of Mr. Hoover.

In 1978, Mr. Webster was brought to Washington and repeatedly asked to take the job. Terry Adamson, a former Justice Department official, recalled that Mr. Webster agreed to meet with Wade McCree, the former Solicitor General, and discuss the F.B.I. job.

According to the account, Mr. McCree sat down with Mr. Webster and "reviewed with him all the reasons he should not take the job, and told him with a twinkle, 'I can think of no reason for you to accept the appointment unless you want to make a patriotic gift to your country.'"

"Webster was had," Mr. Adamson said, "and he knew it."

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